

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7111

INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, AFSP, CO

SUBJECT: FHWA REGIONAL OFFICE

REF: PANAMA 874

1. IN AUGUST 1972 MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS WROTE TO
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR EXPRESSING SURPRISE THAT
FHWA DIVISION ENGINEER IN COLOMBIA HAD TO REPORT THROUGH
REGIONAL ENGINEER IN PANAMA, AND SUGGESTING THAT THIS
PROCEDURE WAS NOT IN ACCORD WITH BILATERAL US-COLOMBIAN
DARIEN GAP AGREEMENT WHICH CALLS FOR DIVISION ENGINEER TO
BE UNDER DIRECTION OF ADMINISTRATOR HIMSELF. REPLY FROM
ACTING FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR EXPLAINED FHWA
ORGANIZATION, ASSURED MINISTER THAT PANAMAIAIAN GOVERNMENT
PLAYED NO ROLE REGARDING FHWA ACTIVITIES IN COLOMBIA AND
POINTED OUT THAT REGIONAL OFFICE LOCATED IN CANAL ZONE.
MINISTER VISITED SECRETARY VOLPE IN WASHINGTON IN
SEPTEMBER 1972 BUT EMBASSY RECORDS DO NOT REVEAL
WHETHER HE RAISED SUBJECT OF REGIONAL OFFICE OR NOT.

2. SINCE THOSE EVENTS, NEW PRESIDENT AND CONSEQUENTLY
NEW MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS HAVE TAKEN OFFICE IN
COLOMBIA. PRESENT MINISTER LESS PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN
DARIEN GAP PROJECT THAN HIS PREDECESSOR, WHO

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WAS SIGNATORY TO US-COLOMBIAN AGREEMENT. NEW

INDIVIDUALS ALSO OCCUPY POSITIONS OF REGIONAL ENGINEER AND DIVISION ENGINEER, AND THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT SUBJECT OF REGIONAL OFFICE IN PANAMA WAS SEEN AS A PROBLEM IN 1972 PARTLY BECAUSE OF WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEN OCCUPANTS OF THESE POSITIONS. IN TERMS OF INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED, THEREFORE, WE JUDGE THAT LOCATION OF REGIONAL ENGINEER HAS BECOME LESS SENSITIVE.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND ALMOST ANYTHING CONCERNING PANAMA ACQUIRES A SPECIAL SENSITIVITY IN COLOMBIA. WITH DARIEN GAP CONSTRUCTION WELL ALONG IN PANAMA AND NOT YET BEGUN IN COLOMBIA THERE IS A TENDENCY TO SUSPECT PARTIALITY TOWARD PANAMA, HEIGHTENING NORMAL SENSITIVITY. FURTHERMORE THERE IS STILL SOME CONCERN, AT LEAST AT A SUB-MINISTERIAL LEVEL, THAT DIVISION ENGINEER IN BOGOTA MUST GET APPROVAL FROM TOO MANY USG OFFICES BEFORE HIS DECISIONS BECOME FINAL.

4. IN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS MENTIONED IN PARA 1 ABOVE THERE WAS NO MENTION OF PLACES OF RESIDENCE OF REGIONAL FHWA EMPLOYEES. WE DOUBT THAT PLACES OF RESIDENCE WOULD BE OF INTEREST TO GOC. CONCEIVABLY, HOWEVER, IN LIGHT OF HISTORY THIS SUBJECT, COLOMBIANS MIGHT TAKE NOTICE IF REGIONAL OFFICE MOVED FROM THE ZONE TO THE REPUBLIC.
VAKY

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